

# Beowulf

## XXXII

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THAT way he went with no will of his own,  
in danger of life, to the dragon's hoard,  
but for pressure of peril, some prince's thane.  
He fled in fear the fatal scourge,  
seeking shelter, a sinful man,  
and entered in. At the awful sight  
tottered that guest, and terror seized him;  
yet the wretched fugitive rallied anon  
from fright and fear ere he fled away,  
and took the cup from that treasure-hoard.  
Of such besides there was store enough,  
heirlooms old, the earth below,  
which some earl forgotten, in ancient years,  
left the last of his lofty race,  
heedfully there had hidden away,  
dearest treasure. For death of yore  
had hurried all hence; and he alone  
left to live, the last of the clan,  
weeping his friends, yet wished to bide  
warding the treasure, his one delight,  
though brief his respite. The barrow, new-ready,  
to strand and sea-waves stood anear,  
hard by the headland, hidden and closed;  
there laid within it his lordly heirlooms  
and heaped hoard of heavy gold  
that warden of rings. Few words he spake:

"Now hold thou, earth, since heroes may not,  
what earls have owned! Lo, erst from thee  
brave men brought it! But battle-death seized  
and cruel killing my clansmen all,  
robbed them of life and a liegeman's joys.  
None have I left to lift the sword,  
or to cleanse the carven cup of price,  
beaker bright. My brave are gone.  
And the helmet hard, all haughty with gold,  
shall part from its plating. Polishers sleep  
who could brighten and burnish the battle-mask;  
and those weeds of war that were wont to brave  
over bicker of shields the bite of steel  
rust with their bearer. The ringed mail  
fares not far with famous chieftain,  
at side of hero! No harp's delight,

no glee-wood's gladness! No good hawk now  
flies through the hall! Nor horses fleet  
stamp in the burgstead! Battle and death  
the flower of my race have reft away."  
Mournful of mood, thus he moaned his woe,  
alone, for them all, and unblithe wept  
by day and by night, till death's fell wave  
o'erwhelmed his heart. His hoard-of-bliss  
that old ill-doer open found,  
who, blazing at twilight the barrows haunteth,  
naked foe-dragon flying by night  
folded in fire: the folk of earth  
dread him sore. 'Tis his doom to seek  
hoard in the graves, and heathen gold  
to watch, many-wintered: nor wins he thereby!

Powerful this plague-of-the-people thus  
held the house of the hoard in earth  
three hundred winters; till One aroused  
wrath in his breast, to the ruler bearing  
that costly cup, and the king implored  
for bond of peace. So the barrow was plundered,  
borne off was booty. His boon was granted  
that wretched man; and his ruler saw  
first time what was fashioned in far-off days.

When the dragon awoke, new woe was kindled.  
O'er the stone he snuffed. The stark-heart found  
footprint of foe who so far had gone  
in his hidden craft by the creature's head. --  
So may the undoomed easily flee  
evils and exile, if only he gain  
the grace of The Wielder! -- That warden of gold  
o'er the ground went seeking, greedy to find  
the man who wrought him such wrong in sleep.  
Savage and burning, the barrow he circled  
all without; nor was any there,  
none in the waste.... Yet war he desired,  
was eager for battle. The barrow he entered,  
sought the cup, and discovered soon  
that some one of mortals had searched his treasure,  
his lordly gold. The guardian waited  
ill-enduring till evening came;  
boiling with wrath was the barrow's keeper,  
and fain with flame the foe to pay  
for the dear cup's loss. -- Now day was fled

as the worm had wished. By its wall no more  
was it glad to bide, but burning flew  
folded in flame: a fearful beginning  
for sons of the soil; and soon it came,  
in the doom of their lord, to a dreadful end.